



News Release

UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

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JUST ONE FIX; ECSTASY USERS KEEP 'ROLLING' IN CHARLESTON AREA

CHARLESTON AIR FORCE BASE, S.C. – Many Christians believe hell is not a fiery pit in the abyss, but rather knowing God and then dealing with the total absence of him. Similarly, some ecstasy users are in their own hell because they've known a sense of euphoria so great, that it can never be achieved again.

Ecstasy, MDMA, Adam, XTC, X or E, as it's also known, is actually a homemade methylenedioxymethamphetamine, according to the Scientific American Website. This club drug has become increasingly popular at nightclubs and more prominently, raves.

"A rave was traditionally a place for hundreds of people to gather and dance," said Special Agent Kevin James, Air Force Office of Special Investigations, Detachment 310. "Now, groups of people get together, rent a warehouse for the weekend and charge \$25 per head to get in. They hire a DJ to spin records, and they know that people are selling E and heroin and whatever else, but that keeps people coming and puts money in their pockets.

"They don't serve beer or alcohol there," he continued. "Then they can let kids of all ages come in. Raves aren't just a problem in L.A. and Chicago. There are lots of raves right here in Charleston."

Ecstasy comes in the form of a pill about the size of an Aspirin, according to James. Usually it has a picture of a flower, bunny or something amiable on it. In the Charleston area, one pill costs about \$30.

"The strength and cost depends on where it was manufactured," said James. "A lot of it found here comes from Canada and the Northeast. Local narcotics and police officers know about raves, but there's

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nothing illegal about going to a party to dance.”

A person feels a great sense of well-being while “rolling,” according to Catherine Hallett, 437th Medical Group Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention and Treatment manager and certified alcohol and drug abuse counselor.

“When someone is rolling, they don’t lose their sense of reality, but their emotions are overblown,” said Hallett. “Any kind of touching feels like it never has before. That’s why you see people on XTC hugging and touching people they normally wouldn’t. All their senses are heightened to a level we haven’t seen from any other drug.”

Some people have used so much E they have been seen rolling around on the ground and drooling on themselves in what looks like a seizure. Rave goers have nicknamed them “E-tards.”

While the initial effects of ecstasy are normally extremely pleasurable, Deborah Wheeler, 437 MDG Demand Reduction Program manager, warns that “crashing” is dangerous.

“You’re so heightened by ecstasy, that when you come down, you come down real hard,” said Wheeler. “Anxiety and depression set in quick. The real problem occurs when you roll again and don’t reach that peak you had the first time you rolled.”

A life change can easily take place after one use, according to Hallett.

“Since you feel better than you’ve ever felt before, there’s a problem with looking forward to anything in life,” said Hallett. “I can’t imagine using a drug that made me feel more alive than some of my happiest moments.”

Ecstasy gives its users such a pleasurable experience because it depletes the brain of serotonin, or the brain’s “naturally released chemical when experiencing pleasure,” according to Hallett. E uses up all the serotonin in the brain in a four- or six-hour roll, and then depletes it immediately.

“Without serotonin, life isn’t so wonderful,” said Hallett. “It takes the body about three or four days to rebuild its supply to a normal level. Even then, you don’t feel near as good as you did while rolling.

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Ecstasy basically gives you an unrealistic high and then ruins your body's chemistry."

Because using E is never as good after the first time, users will often mix it with other drugs in an attempt to reach the peak they felt the first time, said Wheeler.

"People will mix ecstasy with alcohol or marijuana while they're rolling, searching for that first high feeling," said Wheeler. "Unfortunately for them, they do much more damage, and they still don't get that initial feeling."

Raves and Web communities have created a subculture of ecstasy users. Hallett said Web sites like www.bluelight.nu have been established claiming to be informational sites, but tend to promote the E culture. The site even includes a picture gallery of ecstasy users.

Since ecstasy is relatively new, other than psychological problems, the long-term physical effects are unknown. Short-term effects include muscle tension, nausea, blurred vision, faintness, chills, increased heart rate, confusion, depression and anxiety, according to Scientific America.

"Ecstasy doesn't have the number of people being rushed to emergency rooms that crack has, and people assume it's not as dangerous," said Hallett. "That's just not true. Many E users overheat because they don't feel like anything is wrong. On the other end of the spectrum, I've even heard a story about a man drowning himself because he felt thirsty and didn't realize that he drank too much water."

Schools surrounding Charleston AFB have seen an increase in ecstasy, according to James. He said there has been a growing trend in the number of students who attend raves.

"There used to be a rave every Wednesday or Thursday night in the local area," said James. "It's real easy to tell mom and dad 'I'm going to Billy's house to spend the night,' and then go to a rave with your friends."

James said to date, no CAFB members have been caught with ecstasy, but that doesn't mean it's not being used here.

"Ecstasy is only in your system for a short period of time, so it's tough to catch someone during

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random urinalysis,” said James. “As always, the Air Force has a zero-tolerance drug policy, and ecstasy is no exception.”

Some of the tell-tale signs of ecstasy include people wearing surgeons’ masks, using pacifiers, lollipops, candy or chewing on beads, according to James.

“Some users coat the inside of surgeons’ masks with vapor rub,” said James. “They say it intensifies the drug. Everyone chewing on candy or beaded necklaces isn’t necessarily an ecstasy user; but when people use it, their mouths get very dry, and they use things to keep their saliva going. Those are just a couple things to look for.”

Hallett also pointed out the use of a pacifier is two-fold. “Ecstasy users tend to tighten their jaws and then start grinding their teeth and the inside of their mouths,” said Hallett. “Pacifiers can help prevent that.”

OSI is always looking for help in the fight against ecstasy and all illegal substances. To anonymously report ecstasy use, or any crime, call the OSI hotline at 963-3248. James promised the hotline number does not have a caller ID system, and callers are not pressured into giving any information about themselves.

(30)

(Media interested in interviews can contact Staff Sgt. Pamela Smith 963-5589)